Introduction

The CIH presidential commission on leadership and diversity was set up to examine ways to improve the diversity of our industry’s leaders. The business case for diversity in leadership was clear: improved governance and risk management, improved decision making and problem solving, drives forward organisational performance, supports staff retention and recruitment.

The commission outlined 10 challenges and is calling on housing organisations to sign up to and deliver against these by 2020:

1. Know the make up of your communities and annually consider how you can improve the diversity of your board, leadership and staff teams.

2. Compile diversity-related data on the composition of your (1) board (2) executive team and (3) total workforce and publish it in an accessible format in your annual report.

3. Challenge all staff (and external agencies) responsible for recruitment to ensure that all shortlists include appropriate candidates from under-represented groups.

4. Ensure staff members involved in recruitment have completed mandatory training to ensure fair recruitment processes.

5. Set an aspirational target for board/committee recruitment from under-represented groups to ensure that your governance structure is representative of the wider communities you work in.

6. Have in place succession and talent management strategies which reflect the principles of inclusion and diversity, so that all staff can succeed and progress, if they have the right skills and values.

7. Identify and provide appropriate mentoring and coaching opportunities for staff and board members – within your own organisation and/or with external agencies.

8. Make diversity training mandatory for all staff, and use your corporate communications and culture strategies to ensure diversity is embedded within the organisational values.

9. Champion the business case for a diverse workforce and leadership – encourage your colleagues, peers and partners to sign up to the challenges.

10. Sign up and work towards the CIH Charter for Equality and Diversity.

Welsh organisations were proportionally over-represented in the organisations that signed up to the challenge – an encouraging sign for Welsh housing’s approach to embracing diversity.

We’ve asked four organisations who are signed up to the challenge to give us an update on their progress so far. We also asked Tai Pawb, who co-launched the Welsh part of the 10 by 20 challenge, to outline the support and assistance they are providing to the sector to help them deliver on the challenges.

Case study 1

Newydd Housing Association

In accordance with established principles of good governance Newydd reviewed the composition of its board annually and in advance of its recruitment drive for candidates to stand for election at the AGM. Each year it was noted that the board lacked women members and younger people in particular, well over half were male and nearly half were over 65 years old. The routine promise that we would welcome board applications from women and young people was not working.

The 10 by 20 Challenge was an opportunity to publicly commit to addressing these issues and has prompted some positive action.

Recognising that joining the board may be an unfamiliar step for many we have introduced an annual “new to governance” course. Aimed at our tenants it covers the basics about board responsibilities and how meetings are run. Its aim is to better equip people to get involved in their local schools, charities and possibly the Newydd board. One participant has now joined the board as a tenant member.
We have also worked with the National Assembly sponsored project, Women Making A Difference. We now offer two women mentoring and shadowing opportunities as observers on our boards, one of the participants commented,

“I wanted to apply my knowledge, learn and develop my own skills in another sector but didn’t know where to start. I met the team from Women Making a Difference who not only discussed opportunities but played an important role in convincing me that I had the skills needed.

I was introduced to Newydd and was provided with my own mentor to support me through the initial introductions. Everyone made me feel welcome and involved from day one.”

It’s still early days but we have until 2020 to meet the challenges. One year on we have managed to attract some younger board members but on gender equality our tenant election process selected two men to replace two women! Sometimes it is one step forward two steps back but we are challenging ourselves to address the issue.

**Case study 2**

**NPT Homes**

Last year we were in the position where we had 3 tenant board member vacancies. This gave us an opportunity to look at the equality and diversity of our board members and address any imbalances in the profile. The analysis showed that females and younger people were under represented on our board.

With this in mind we thought about how to attract applicants from the under-represented groups. We looked at where we advertised the vacancies, the type of promotional material used and the timing of our engagement with people across the community.

To attract females and younger people we took the promotional campaign to local supermarkets and the local shopping centre over a lunchtime.

We also attended a jobs fair at the local college and set up a stall in the foyer of one of the largest employers in the area. Instead of producing reams of printed promotional literature, staff at the events explained how our board works. By talking to people and listening to their life experiences we could explain how those experiences and skills could be transferred and beneficial to our board. As a result 15 expressions of interest were received in the vacancies from a cross-section of people who we had not engaged with before.

A local charitable training provider was employed to deliver training for those interested to give them an in-depth understanding of the behaviours, skills and commitment expected of a board member. Training was arranged outside of working hours to make it more accessible to all.

Nine interested parties successfully completed the pre-board training and six went on to stand for election to our board. As a result of our promotional campaign we achieved an improved gender balance and age profile.

![Board gender balance](image1)

![Board age profile](image2)

Having a more diverse board has encouraged debate at board meetings and provided a wider perspective on decision making.
Case study 3

Pobl Group

In 2012 Seren Group established a task group to drive up our work around equality. Whilst we complied with all the legislation and monitoring requirements we wanted to do better. For us equality was about more than just the ‘protected characteristics’. If we wanted to live up to our values and become a more diverse and inclusive organisation we needed to be more proactive.

Gaining a quality mark would be a good way to engage all our people in achieving our aim. The National Centre for Diversity works with different organisations from universities to railways and hotels in transforming the way they approach equality and diversity.

It took over a year with NCD spending 3 days talking to over 70 people from the front line to the chief executive, board members. Customers and stakeholders were surveyed and a vast number of policies, publications were reviewed. A gap analysis showed that although we were doing well there were things we could do better. They also found there was enthusiasm and commitment from staff to get things right.

We had to produce a 16 point action plan required by the quality mark addressing the areas identified in the gap analysis. An infographic summarising the action plan was produced for all staff, board members and customers.

A wide number of staff made a commitment to undertake and complete the actions, including a new training programme, KPI framework, EIA’s and analysis of recruitment and communications. Finally in April 2014 we were the first RSL in Wales to achieve the quality mark.

In April this year, the Pobl group was formed from the merger of Grwp Gwalia and Seren. In aspiring to be an organisation that challenges discrimination, promotes equality and values diversity we aim to achieve the full quality mark for Pobl.

The process of achieving this for our new group will involve input from over 2,000 staff our boards and the tenants and people we support. It will be a significant piece of work but we are confident that the commitment of our people to equality, diversity and inclusion will help us achieve this.

Case study 4

Rhondda Housing Association

Rhondda Housing Association is based in Tonypandy, in the heart of the Rhondda Valleys. We have over 1,600 properties and are leading the way in developing new homes and commercial units throughout the borough. We provide floating support and first class financial inclusion services, as well as award-winning community regeneration.

Rhondda Cynon Taf is far from the most diverse part of Wales, with only 2.65% of the community made up of those from BME groups. It’s tricky to strike the balance between having a diverse workforce and a representative workforce. We’re really proud of the fact that over 60% of our staff come from the Rhondda – we’ve always been a local landlord looking to provide employment opportunities for the area in which we operate. We definitely want people working with us who are representative of the communities we are here to serve.

However, we’re conscious that we don’t want to rest on our laurels, or take equality in our workforce for granted. Last year, we drew up a staff charter outlining the commitments that we make to our staff as an employer – the first of these is to value diversity amongst our staff and treat everyone with respect. At RHA, we challenge behaviour that doesn’t live up to these standards.

We know that diversity in the workforce starts with recruitment, and getting this right is absolutely fundamental. We’ve started a programme of training to all those involved in the recruitment process. Obviously, we’ll be covering our legal obligations, but we want to go further than this. We’ve engaged Tai Pawb to run unconscious bias training, to make sure that our staff aren’t making decisions based on hardwired natural biases.

Lesley Davies, our CEO said “As an employer we encourage and promote the benefits of team working. We strive towards ensuring all staff recognise that
our strength lies in our collective differences not our similarities. We are really proud of the fact that our latest Great Places to Work survey also highlighted that 95.5% of our staff agree that Rhondda Housing Association treats people fairly regardless of their differences.

Tai Pawb update

A year ago, Tai Pawb co-organised the Welsh launch of the 10 by 20 initiative and from the beginning it was crucial to us that our support is not restricted to words but also translates into real assistance offered to our members in turning their commitments into reality. Below are just a few examples of what we have done so far:

- We trained 460 staff and board members across 19 organisations on equality, diversity, leadership, unconscious bias and related issues.

- We supported members in investigating the make-up of their diverse communities, the issues facing their diverse staff and service users and helped to use this knowledge to improve their impact. We did this through a range of solutions including tailored consultancy support, our Equality Helpline, a good practice seminar and a briefing on board diversity, as well as organising our member led #WHENetwork meeting focused on diversity in recruitment practices.

- We reviewed the diversity of our own board and used targeted recruitment to fill the gaps in skills and protected characteristics which were underrepresented (this is something that we do every year).

- We signed up to a Time to Change pledge, raised awareness of mental health amongst our own staff and members and made sure that at least one manager was trained in Mental Health Awareness.

- We launched our #Leaderlikeme campaign aimed at encouraging support for leadership in diversity across all organisational levels.

Turning commitments into reality

Tai Pawb believes strongly that housing providers in Wales are leading the way in their commitment to equality and diversity. There is also agreement however that we need a more consistent way of testing commitments against reality and of measuring progress.

Therefore, we have composed a list of outcomes that cut across organisations and that we would expect to see. These are spread across the areas of governance and leadership, delivery of services, engagement and organisational culture, and are soon to be published in Welsh Housing Quarterly.

Currently, we are working closely with Welsh Government and a range of stakeholders to formulate a reality and logic checked set of standards which will help housing associations meet the above outcomes. These standards would apply to all housing associations irrespective of their structure, or size while allowing organisations to find a fit with their way of working. These will be available in the months to come.

We are also aware that outcomes and standards can be met in a variety of different ways and need to be tested against the reality experienced by staff and service users, progress needs to be checked and measured. To help our members with this process, the above outcomes and standards will form the basis of a brand new Quality Mark from Tai Pawb – a service which will do both: reality check and measure progress. Work is underway to develop this service as we are making sure it meets our members, stakeholders and Welsh Government aspirations and expectations.

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